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AUTHOR	Loftus, Laura; Walter, Virginia
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ABSTRACT

To facilitate the least restrictive education of handicapped children required by Public Law 94-142, special educators are encouraged to cooperate with regular classroom teachers in meeting the needs of handicapped children. An outline of eight suggestions for developing communication skills and effective consultation techniques focuses on being accessible, showing interest, establishing a conducive environment, and listening. The paper concludes with a list of references. (LP)

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FOR SPECIAL EDUCATORS: TIPS FOR WORKING WITH REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Prepared by
Laura Loftus
and
Virginia Walter

For Your Information

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Public Law 94-142, Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, requires that handicapped children be educated with nonhandicapped children to the maximum extent possible. As greater emphasis is placed on individual educational needs, more handicapped children are being served in regular classroom settings, producing strong pressures for special and regular educators to share the responsibility for the educational programming for handicapped children. Special and regular educators need to work cooperatively, indeed become partners, in meeting the educational needs of handicapped children.

In the past, effective communication between educators has been discussed rather than practiced. It may take a while for both special and regular educators to feel comfortable in dealing with each other and respecting their areas of expertise. In the process of planning educational programs for handicapped children, problems may arise. From time-to-time, there may be things that concern you or that you would like to change. Remember, that by keeping the lines of communication open and working toward advancing a positive relationship, appropriate educational programs may be achieved.

The following suggestions by Harris, Rosen and Schwartz (1980) can help develop communication skills and effective consultation techniques for the special educator.

Try to do the following to communicate effectively with colleagues:

- Be accessible to teachers. If teachers are to be able to discuss problems with you, you should be approachable, available, and able to give the time and attention.
- Show an interest in the work and opinions of teachers. Initiate informal discussions about their activities in the classroom, views about teaching and the like. These discussions may be conducted in informal settings such as the lunchroom, playground, and around the ditto machine. You may want to observe each teacher's classroom environment. If problems arise concerning a handicapped student's placement, it helps if you know what the classroom climate is like.
- Make your role known to the teachers. In your conversations with teachers, you may want to talk about the nature of your work, your activities, what you would like to do, and the kind of problems you have been involved with (remembering to keep identifiable information about a client confidential). If it is approp-

riate in your school system, the more formal approach of an inservice workshop could deal with such information.

- When a teacher has a problem or needs assistance in implementing a program, work with that teacher. Make efforts to help start the implementation of a new program, show (not just tell) the teacher what to do in the classroom, if possible. Be sure to follow-up on the progress of any implementation.
- Establish an environment conducive to open communication. While crowded lunchrooms and playgrounds are fine for informal greetings, a serious discussion should be allotted sufficient time and distractions minimized (e.g., no children in the room).
- Express your thoughts clearly and concisely. Think about what you will say (e.g., the issues you want to raise, the opinions you want to express). When talking with colleagues, lead them to rephrase your comments so that you can see if they understand.
- Listen to the views of others. While it is important that you **give** your colleagues **time to talk**, it is equally important that you **listen to and understand** what is being said. Try to rephrase your colleagues' comments to clarify issues and make sure you understand.
- At the end of your meetings, clarify points made and activities agreed upon. It may be helpful to put some of the suggestions in writing for future reference.

To develop positive school relationships, truly seek to include the regular teacher as a team member and decision maker in the educational planning for handicapped children. Attempt to resolve problems in a cooperative environment. Effective educational programs for handicapped children will be developed if special and regular educators are willing to work cooperatively.

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